



Pretoriuskop Restcamp, southern sector

Kruising in the Kruger



by RACHEL HUNT South Africa Specialist

The safari experience in South Africa has changed dramatically over the last few years; new super-luxurious lodges situated in private reserves, staffed with butlers, adorned with plunge pools and featuring extensive wine lists are now in abundance. As you would guess, these places are fantastic but the cost can sometimes prohibit people visiting a place where the wildlife, not the accommodation, should be the focus of their trip. With this in mind, Rachel Hunt recently explored the more affordable accommodation options available in and around the Kruger National Park.



Hippo in the river

Staying outside of the Kruger

My journey started with a short flight from Johannesburg to Nelspruit and then, after collecting my hire car, a short drive to the outskirts of the Kruger. Once here there are a huge variety of high quality and good value B&Bs or guesthouses from which to choose. I stayed at a B&B called Buhala, one that I have very fond memories of after being lucky enough to stay there one Christmas with my family. The house overlooks the Crocodile River and whilst we were having our Christmas lunch there were hippos munching in the river as well as the odd elephant and wildebeest within view. From these types of accommodation it is just a 10 to 20 minutes drive to the Kruger National Park and the vast array of wildlife that the park has to offer.

This means that there are some good and bad points with regards driving in the Kruger. There are tar roads but they make the drive smoother and, as they absorb heat of the sun, attract animals in the early evening. On one occasion I was unable to drive out of the park as a pack of hyena were warming themselves on the road. Yes there are other vehicles about in certain areas of the park but on the flip side they can help you spot animals that you would have otherwise missed. Last April a driver stopped to tell me that there was a leopard sleeping on a rock just ahead, something I would have never seen without their help. When you venture off the tar roads, onto the smaller dirt roads and come across something that no-one else can see then it makes it extra special. Again, last April, I was driving with a colleague and we encountered two lionesses and their six little cubs. We sat with them for about 15 minutes and felt like the luckiest people in the park.

Once in the park, exploring is very easy. Maps are readily available at the gates and these enable you to plan your own route and there are even a few restaurants in the park that provide a safe place to stop for lunch. I know this appears a little artificial, and as a result a lot of people think that this is not 'real' safari, but the Kruger has been a reserve since 1898, opened to the public since 1927 and it is therefore more developed and the animals are habituated to game viewing vehicles.

For those uncomfortable with driving alone you can choose to go on an organised game drive with experienced and knowledgeable rangers. Either way, this is a very affordable option for exploring the park.



Room at the Hoya Hoya, a private concession



Room at Mjajane, bordering the Kruger



Leopard in the Greater Kruger area

Private Concessions within the Kruger

Some areas of the Kruger have been leased to the private companies or individuals and are called Private Concessions. They are exclusive in terms of only allowing their guest to view the surrounding wildlife but differ from the super luxury lodges in that they are a third cheaper and are more accessible as they are in the middle of Kruger. They offer excellent game drives with knowledgeable rangers on hand to help you gain a greater insight into the wildlife and the park itself. One of the best things about staying in a Concession is during the early mornings and late evening when all the day visitors have left you have the park to yourself.

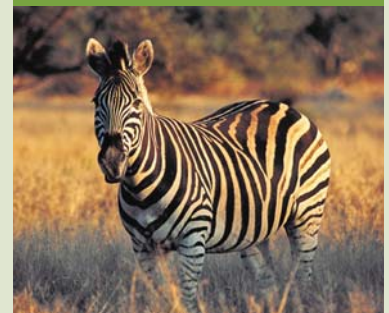
Book Early in 2010

With South Africa hosting the FIFA World Cup from 11th June to 11th July, it promised to be a very busy time for both domestic and foreign visitors. Our advice is to ensure that you book early and also be aware that flights to neighbouring Namibia, Botswana and Mozambique will be in high demand. For more information please call one of our South Africa specialists on **01993 838 550** or visit www.audleytravel.com/southafrica

Government Rest Camps within the Kruger

Another way of exploring the Kruger is by staying in government run rest camps which are dotted throughout the park. They vary in standard and size but are basically a rondavel (round hut with a thatched roof) and feature an ensuite bathroom, cooking facilities including a Braai (BBQ). I do like my luxuries and my team mates were teasing me a little about staying at a rest camp but honestly I was pleasantly surprised and very happy staying here. The main advantage is their location; they were set up before the private reserves, guaranteeing an enviable location in the park. In addition to this, they are really cheap at about £50 a night, clean, modern and very friendly. There is nothing quite like cooking on your Braai, with rutting impala 20 metres away from you. This option is definitely not to be snubbed and is one of the highlights of my time in South Africa. I self-drove when I was here but every camp offers escorted game drives. They are in slightly bigger vehicles in comparison to the private reserves and concessions but then the savings you make by staying here more than make up for it.

FACT file



A 10-night tour including three nights in Cape Town, two nights in the Wine Regions and then five nights in the Kruger staying in Rest Camps and four star B&Bs costs from **£1,850 per person**, including flights, transfers and car hire. The same tour but staying in a B&B near the Kruger and four to five star B&Bs in the Cape area costs from **£2,150 per person**. A tour staying in Concessions in the Kruger and a 5 star B&B in the Cape area cost from **£2,950 per person**. For more information, please contact our South Africa specialists on **01993 838 550**.

www.audleytravel.com/southafrica